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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 001150

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [HA](#)
SUBJECT: THE POLITICAL BASIS FOR VIOLENCE IN GONAIVES -
PART 3 OF 3

REF: A. PORT AU PRINCE 1080

[1](#)B. PORT AU PRINCE 1148

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Classified By: AMBASSADOR JANET A. SANDERSON FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)
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[1](#)1. (C) Summary. MINUSTAH and Haitian National Police (HNP) officials joined in the chorus who believe that the basis for the violence in Gonaives is the political rivalry between Prime Minister Jacques Edouard Alexis and Senator Youri Latortue, both of whom are from Gonaives and are positioning themselves for the next presidential election. Moreover, the manner in which law enforcement officials contextualize the violence is cohesive only if one equates President Rene Preval's Lespwa party with former President Aristide's Lavalas party. Non-politically affiliated bandits are taking advantage of the disorder to commit crimes under the cover of politically motivated criminality. The HNP, by aggressively pursuing and arresting gang leaders, is trying to send the message that it, and not the politically connected gangs, controls the streets of Gonaives. While political tensions in the rest of the country have eased, residents in Gonaives still seem overwhelmingly to equate criminal violence with national politics. Likewise, law enforcement officials do not expect the political tension to ease with the eradication of the gangs; however, they do expect the human costs of the rivalry to abate. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff on May 30-31 conducted nine interviews in Gonaives, of which two were with politicians, two with law enforcement and five with civil society. This third cable reports on the interviews with Amidou Ouedradgo, MINUSTAH's Chief of Regional Office for the Artibonite, and Ernst Dorfeuille, the HNP's Deputy Commissaire for Gonaives.

[1](#)3. (C) MINUSTAH's Ouedradgo believes that two factors account for the insecurity in Gonaives: ''pure banditry and the rivalry between Latortue and Alexis''. In addition to their criminal activities, the politically unaffiliated bandits were also fighting among themselves for turf. Regarding the political rivalry between Latortue and Alexis, he noted that since January 1, 2007, there has been an

incident at every public event featuring a high-level GoH official; the latest being a crowd throwing stones at Alexis during Judge Hugues St. Pierre's funeral. The local HNP under the previous commissaire and the judiciary were cautious in dealing with the politically connected, heavily armed gangs, especially with the gang associated with Wilfort Ferdinand, alias 'Ti Will,' who was a leader in the 'The Cannibal Army' that played an instrumental part in ousting Aristide.

¶4. (C) Ouedradgo judges that Latortue is more popular in the Artibonite region than Alexis. He noted that Latortue, who comes to Gonaives almost every weekend, is seeking to get national stature through the senate and his chairing of the justice and security committee. Ouedradgo noted that Latortue planned to change the name of his party from 'The Artibonite in Action' to 'Haiti in Action,' and his advocacy of an army is a direct political bid for the allegiance of students, many of whom are nationalistic.

¶5. (C) Ouedradgo claimed that with the changing of its commissaire in May, the local HNP now received strong direction from its headquarters in Port-au-Prince, which had issued 30 arrest warrants for Gonaives gang members. The HNP in Port-au-Prince, in conjunction with MINUSTAH HQ, sent SWAT teams to execute the arrest warrants. In the meantime, ARBAT (the Argentinean Battalion), UNPOL, and Gonaives' HNP patrol the gang infested Raboteau slum in rotation. Ouedradgo concluded confidently that the HNP and MINUSTAH will successfully crack down on the gangs, but the political tension in Gonaives will remain, albeit without the human costs of criminality.

¶6. (SBU) HNP Deputy Commissaire Dorfeuille bluntly stated that under its new leadership, the Gonaives HNP planned on being 'myth busters,' that is, deflating the widely held assumptions that there were 'untouchables' in Gonaives and

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that there were 'no-go areas' in Gonaives. In addition, Dorfeuille noted that the HNP wanted to win the confidence of the city's inhabitants, who overwhelmingly oppose the gangs.

¶7. (SBU) Dorfeuille believed that the insecurity in Gonaives was caused by 'the struggle between Lavalas and its enemies.' The HNP's weakness in Gonaives had allowed the hostility between the two groups to erupt into the open. HNP Director General Mario Andersol had therefore transferred the former police commissaire and installed HNP leadership that he trusted. Dorfeuille acknowledged rumors that the gangs not only were heavily armed, but were continuing to arm themselves. He also believed that the gangs were ultimately planning to attack the HNP, but that the HNP had been able to respond first.

¶8. (C) Comment. Foremost among President Preval's accomplishments has been his ability to calm political tensions, particularly between former Lavalas and anti-Lavalas supporters. Gonaives' local tensions, however, still reflect perceived national tension between these two tendencies, with Alexis and Latortue representing each side. While we do not discount that Alexis' political ambitions contribute to the perception that GoH efforts to rein in local gang leaders are politically motivated, the fact remains that government representatives, and the HNP in particular, represent legitimate state authority. Remarkably, neither law enforcement official mentioned that the HNP, by going after the gangs, was simply fulfilling a standard, well-recognized police function. A sustained, successful effort by the HNP will hopefully alter perceptions in Gonaives that ulterior motives lie behind efforts to impose the rule of law.

SANDERSON